

Gossip and Slander

Rom 1:28-32 - And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

Introduction:

A. Gossip has been defined as idle talk or compulsive chattering and news-mongering, including the spreading of groundless rumor. It is not always hostile or malevolent. But this article focuses on the kind of gossip that complains about others behind their back, exposing their faults (or supposed faults) and pulling them down in the estimation of all who will listen. This is about the ‘backbiting’s and whisperings’ mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:20.

2 Corinthians 12:20 - For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;

B. We begin with a few comments about hopeless, persistent gossips. Some people – even some Christians – seem driven to negative gossip about others. The tendency has –become so powerful that it can no longer be control in some.

I. In a World of Sinners:

[These words paint a dark picture of a world where God has been pushed aside and people are given over to do what is wrong without regret. If given the choice, would you want to live with these folks? Certainly, Paul makes it clear that God has condemned such a lifestyle and stand ready to bring these reprobates to judgment (“deserve death”).]

A. Paul often uses a list to make his point. I see at least two objectives in his lists:

1. He wants us to see the pervasive aspect of the behavior by showing the many ways that it is manifested. These godless people are “filled with every kind of wickedness” v, 29), not just a single or occasional sin.
2. He wants us to see the connectivity and similarity between these “manifest” behaviors
3. Although they are different, they all share the same judgment. “Those who do such things deserve death” (v. 32).

B. Some of the practices and attitudes of heart that are listed are expected. We would include them if we were making the list. But others may surprise us. There are three that stand out to me.

1. “Disobedient to parents” (v. 30) - Many have the idea that it is just natural for children to disobey their parents
 - a. It is there right and or even their calling to seek their own way

- b. But God is serious about submission, and He expects children to do what their parents tell them to do.
2. The other two are somewhat connected: “gossips” and “slanderers” (v. 29,30) Would you have included gossiping in this list? Paul puts the person who speaks evil of another person in the same list as the murderer and sexual deviant. God is serious about what we say and why. Let’s take a closer look at this sin and why it makes the list.

II. *Talking like the Devil:*

[The word “slanderer” has an interesting connection. The word in Romans 1:30 (*kategor*) is translated as “*backbiter*”, but the most common word for slanderer is used to identify Satan himself. *Diabolos* is often rendered “devil”. Slander is his name and his game.]

Revelation 12:9-10 - And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.

- A. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, slander means “*malicious talk; to spread damaging information; to defame; to speak ill of.*” Slander is the work of the Devil, and those who slander others are on his team.
- B. Gossip is derived from the idea of “*whispering.*”
 1. According to the same dictionary, “gossip” means “*To indulge in idle talk or rumors about others; spreading of sensational stories.*”
 2. Funk and Wagnall’s dictionary, defines it as “*Idle, or malicious talk about others.*” Although we generally think of gossip as an innocuous discourtesy, the Bible treats it as a close cousin to slander.
 3. Vines says the backbiter does his talking openly, the gossip (whisperer) “does it clandestinely.”
- C. The KJV uses the word “*talebearer*” to describe this person who would speak evil of others, and the talebearer was consistently condemned in the O.T. scriptures.

Leviticus 19:16 - Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD (KJV).

Leviticus 19:16 - 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD (NASB).

1. God presents the gossip as one who does not care about the life of his neighbor but uses his tongue as a weapon against him.
2. Gossip is a sign of foolishness and indicates that one is not to be trusted.

Proverbs 11:12-13 - He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent. He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.

- a. If one comes to you to talk about another, you can be sure that he or she goes away and talks about you as well.
- b. In Prov 20:18 the wise man extols the need for counsel before deciding (such as going to war), but then in the next verse he warns against the talebearer (gossiper) who readily reveals secrets.
- c. The Hebrew word for “talebearer” literally means “...a trafficker, who ‘goes about’ offering his wares of scandal, and ‘revealing secrets,’ to the prejudice of others... he flatters with his lips – to elicit from you what he may afterward repeat to others. Though there is need of “counsel” yet it is not safe to ask it from everyone, and to tell secrets to everyone. (from Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary)

III. *Swallowing Everything*: (ex. Feeding the dogs the leftovers, they eat it all down with little discernment.)

[The proverb writer gives us an interesting picture of the other side of gossip.]

Proverbs 18:8 - The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.

[You might notice that the KJV renders this differently (*the words of a talebearer are as wounds*). Certainly, his words do wound others, but the best rendering gives another thought.]

- A. The words of the gossip are “choice morsels” (NIV) that are easily swallowed by others
 1. The Complete Word Study Dictionary says the word here is a verb meaning to “swallow greedily
 2. As a passive noun, it means something gulped. It is used to describe gossip as something that most people will swallow whole (Prov 18:8) and be permeated by it (Prov 26:22).
- B. There is a responsibility to turn a deaf ear to the words of the gossip, recognizing that if you listen it will hard to dismiss what is said.

IV. *Masquerading as Concern*:

[Gossip is one of the most dangerous sins because it is so subtle and ambiguous — many are unable to recognize it]

- A. Gossip often masquerades as “concern” for others. Rumors or gossip will seem more palatable if they first hide behind a pretentious expression of concern. “*I hate to say anything about this to you, but I’m ‘concerned’ about so and so.*”

- B. At other times the gossip will seek you out as their “confidante” to unload their “heavy heart” about their concerns.
- C. Of a truth, the gossip is not sincerely concerned about solving the problem, only in talking about it — stirring it up.

Proverbs 16:28 - A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.

1. Any person who is genuinely concerned about solving a problem, will follow Jesus’ counsel in Matthew 18 and privately confront the person at the source as a first response. (Story of one Christian who began to talk to another Christian about a mutual friend who was having problems – “*What did So and So tell you when you mentioned this to him?*” – a wake-up call to what was happening and why.
2. There are times when people need to confide with a friend in the Lord. But the desire to solve the problem is the foremost reason he opens his mouth.

IV. *Every Idle Word:*

Matt. 12:36-37 - "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

[John MacArthur says that idle talk includes that which is *barren* or *worthless*, *flippant* or *irresponsible*.]

- A. This means that words are designed to mean something
 1. They are to be spoken with purpose, not just for the pleasure of talking
 2. Gossip is wrong because it is communication that has the wrong purpose.
- B. After obligating the church to financially support certain widows who have gained a godly reputation among others, Paul tells them to refuse some younger widows who “**learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.** (1 Tim 5:13).
- 1. Idle people tend to engage in idle talk. (commercial for Nextel where businesspeople communicate (beep) with each other in short concise statements and in just a few words get things done.) Jesus said, “Let your yes be yes and your no be no.”
 - a. These idle widows would spend their time wandering from house to house, creating a situation where they easily become involved in the other people’s business.
 - b. Paul uses the term “***busybodies***”
 - 1) The Complete Word Study Dictionary says this word is used of people who scurry about fussing over, and meddling in, other peoples’ affairs being overwrought with unnecessary care

2) Notice that the “busy body” gets that way by being idle. Gossip may indicate laziness because it is easy to talk about others, it takes real work to help them

3) **Vine’s says...** “*some who are not busied in their own business, but are overbusied in that of others.*”

c. How serious is this? Again, I am called to consider a list. Peter says

1 Peter 4:14-16 - If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

2. Let me ask you, as a Christian, do you occasionally slip up and commit a murder here or there?

a. Do you occasionally find yourself burglarizing a home or stealing things from the store? Of course, a Christian lifestyle doesn’t behave that way.

b. But how about gossip or slander?

c. Do you engage in idle talk or rumors about others?

d. Do you participate in bad-mouthing or spreading rumors about others?

3. According to the Bible, these sins are equal in their ability to cause others to blaspheme God and cause the Christian to lose their salvation.

V. ***Some Facts about Gossip*** (let me propose my own list)

A. Gossip & slander disqualifies persons for spiritual leadership (1 Tim. 3:11, Jas. 3:2).

B. Gossip always contributes to a problem and never to a solution.

C. Gossip destroys friendships and cripples’ churches.

D. Gossip always distorts and exaggerates and is never a reliable source of truth.

E. Those who gossip & slander are not in right fellowship with God

VI. ***What to do about Gossip:***

A. If you have been a gossip, confess this as sin and ask Christ to forgive you.

B. Keep your nose out of another person’s business.

C. If you can’t say something good or encouraging about others, then don’t say anything at all.

D. Never criticize another person, except to their own face with the intent to help. Criticism can never be “constructive” if expressed to anyone else.

E. If your “friends” start bad-mouthing others to you, stop them in their tracks — refuse to be a partaker of their sins.

F. Avoid association with persons who gossip.

Conclusion:

A. Questions to ask myself:

1. Is the information true?
2. Is there a basis for it?
3. Is it rumor or innuendo?
4. Will anyone be made better by telling it?
5. Will I feel better towards the one being talked about by hearing the things being spread by a gossip?
6. Am I assisting in strengthening the character of one whom I allow to gossip about others?
7. Do I not do much evil by instead of going to that person, I began to mention his wrongdoing to others?
8. Am I not responsible for the unfaithfulness of others when they have been hardened through my spreading unfounded charges about them, or by listening to others who do it?

B. We need to take gossip and slander as seriously as God does. The Psalmist said, “I said, “I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle While the wicked are in my presence” (Psalms 39:1).